CONVERSATIONS of BEN JONSON with WILLIAM DRUMMOND

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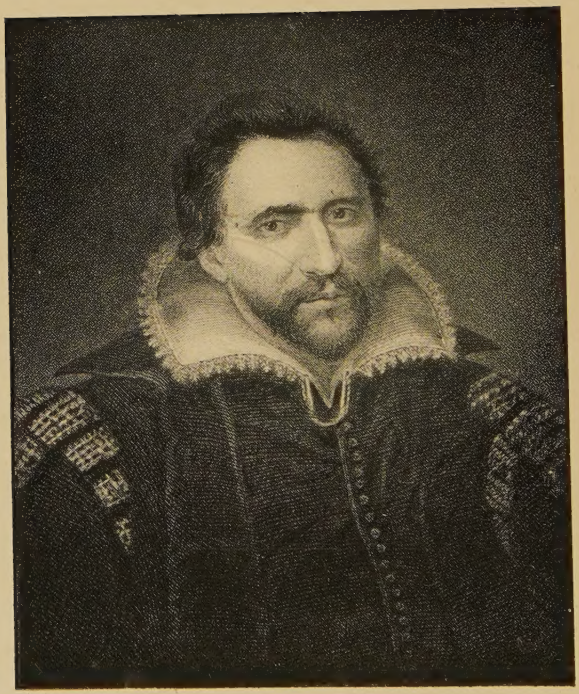
CONVERSATIONS OF BEN JONSON

WITH

WILLIAM DRUMMOND



BEN JONSON.

Conversations of Ben Jonson

WITH

William Drummond

OF HAWTHORNDEN

EDITED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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GAY AND BIRD

22 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

LONDON

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CONVERSATIONS OF BEN JONSON

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE 'Conversations' of Ben Jonson with his brother poet, William Drummond, Laird of Hawthornden, are of an immense literary and historical value. From the notes recorded by Drummond of these 'Conversations' we derive an insight into the characteristics of the majority of the most illustrious celebrities that flourished

during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. It is, in fact, impossible for either a student of the politics and the letters of that period, or for a would-be biographer of Ben Jonson, to acquire a satisfactory comprehension of his subject without reference to this information bequeathed to us by Drummond.

Notwithstanding the importance of these 'Conversations,' their circulation in print has hitherto been by no means so extensive as would be imagined. The principal honour of introducing them, in the shape of a separate volume, to the world at large, may be properly held to date back to the year 1842, when they were, owing to the industry and research of Mr. David Laing, printed from Sir Robert Sibbald's manuscript copy, and published in book form by the Shakespeare Society.

But editions issued by means of the munificence of learned societies must be more or less limited in both circulation and popularity; and the present editor may be pardoned if he considers that there exists sufficient room for another impression, which, whilst accurately conveying the same text as that transcribed by Laing, is reproduced for the convenience of his readers in the modern style of spelling.

The 'Conversations' recorded by Drummond took place when Jonson visited him at Hawthornden, in 1618-19. The old tradition that Jonson, then in his forty-sixth year, walked all the way from London to Edinburgh solely from the desire to visit Drummond has long been abandoned as incorrect, since it is evident that

'Rare' Ben's visit to Hawthornden[1] was merely an incident in a tour, undertaken out of curiosity to see something of Scotland and the Scotch.

Of the friendship that existed between the poets not much can be advanced in favour. There can be no doubt that a mutual love of learning was the sole subject in which their opinions remained in cordial harmony. The two men were of so totally different character that their lack of agreement is not surprising. In the eyes of Drummond his Southern rival was, considered from a social point of view, a vulgar, boastful, tipsy plebeian, whilst jovial, open-handed, open-hearted[2] Ben

[1] Hawthornden is situated some nine miles south-east of Edinburgh, and close to the famous Roslin Chapel.

[2] 'He wore his heart upon his sleeve, for daws to peck at.'

must have felt repulsed by the strict and somewhat narrow views and inclinations of his aristocratic host, who was to die broken-hearted by the execution of his King.[1]

Between the genius of the pair it is unnecessary to institute comparisons. But the most sincere admirer of Drummond must admit that Jonson was not only the most original, but, generally speaking, the greater writer, although some of the 'Scottish Petrarch's' Sonnets admittedly reach a high rank of excellence. Jonson's criticism that Drummond's poems 'were not after the fancy of the time' was, perhaps, scarcely correct, for many of them bear, in point both of style and choice of

[1] Charles I. Drummond died December 4, 1649; Jonson August 6, 1637. Drummond was born December 13, 1585; Jonson in the year 1573.

subject, a close resemblance to works of certain of the Elizabethan poets.

Jonson's journey to Scotland was remarkable for reasons other than that of his meeting with Drummond. Travelling from the English to the Scottish Metropolis was in those days no mean adventure, especially as the 'man-mountain,' according to his own account, both in going and returning, accomplished a big piece of the way on foot. The fame of his exploit attracted an imitator in the person of John Taylor, the 'water-poet,' who, starting later than Ben, had an interview with him at Leith. Taylor, after having penetrated further north than Jonson, returned to London before the intercourse at Hawthornden, which did not take place till December, 1618, and could, perhaps, not have lasted much more than a fort-

night. Taylor,[1] who is referred to in these 'Conversations' as 'the Sculler,' boasted that he started on his 'pennyless' journey without any friends whatsoever, and depended entirely on the hospitality of strangers to obtain both food and lodging, and sometimes clothes.

A couple of amusing anecdotes are handed down in connection with Jonson's journey, although the second may be accepted *cum grano.* On quitting London Ben called to say farewell on Bacon, who told him that he 'liked not to see Poetry

[1] Taylor, by profession a waterman on the Thames, was a prolific writer of verse. He was the original biographer (in rhyme) of Thomas Parr, the celebrated centenarian, who (so his tombstone states) lived to the age of 152. 'Old Parr' was a native of Shropshire, and died in London, 1635. He is buried in Westminster Abbey. He claimed to have been born in the reign of Edward IV., and to have had a child when over a hundred years old.

go on other feet than poetical dactyls and spondees.' On reaching Drummond's house he was greeted by his host with the improvised salutation—

'Welcome, welcome, royal Ben !'

to which he forthwith replied :

'Thank ye, thank ye, Hawthornden !'[1]

Drummond's notes of Jonson's 'Conversations' are not always fit for family reading, but although no attempt has been made to 'Bowdlerize' this edition, certain minute information relative to the love-affairs of Ben Jonson, Sir Henry Wotton, and young Ralegh — possessing no

[1] In explanation of this, it is hardly necessary to state that, in Scotland, gentlemen are often called by the titles of their estates instead of by their surnames, *e.g.*, Cluny, for Macpherson of Cluny; Lochiel, for Cameron of Lochiel; Keppoch, for Macdonald of Keppoch.

literary or historic interest — has been omitted. Jonson's criticism of Queen Elizabeth's morals, coarse though it undoubtedly is, has been verified by the testimony of other contemporary writers, and, on account of its historical value, has been printed in full.

CHAPTER II

BEN JONSON'S CONVERSATIONS WITH WILLIAM DRUMMOND

THE following is Drummond's account of the 'informations' given to him by Ben Johnson, when they conversed together at Hawthornden, in 1618-19.

I.

That he had an intention to perfect an epic poem entitled 'Heroologia,' of the worthies of his country raised by fame, and was to dedicate it to his country; it is all in couplets, for he detesteth all other rhymes. He said he had written a 'Dis-

course of Poetry' both against Campion and Daniel, especially the last, where he proves couplets to be the bravest sort of verses, especially when they are broken, like hexameters; and that cross-rhymes and stanzas (because the purpose would lead him beyond eight lines to conclude) were all forced.

II.

He recommended to my reading Quintilian (who he said would tell me the faults of my verses as if he lived with me), and Horace, Pliny the Younger's Epistles, Tacitus, Juvenal, Martial, whose epigram 'Vitam quæ faciunt beatorem,' etc., he hath translated.

III.

His censure of the English Poets was this: That Sidney did not keep a decorum in making everyone speak as well as himself.

Spenser's stanzas pleased him not, nor his matter, the meaning of which Allegory[1] he had delivered in papers to Sir Walter Ralegh.

Samuel Daniel was a good honest man, had no children, but no poet; that Michael Drayton's 'Polyolbion,' if he had performed what he promised to write (the deeds of all the Worthies) had been excellent: his long verses pleased him not; that Silvester's translation of Du Bartas was not well done, and that he wrote his verses before it, ere he understood to confer[2]; nor that of Fairfax's;[3] that the translations of Homer and Virgil in long Alexandrines were but

[1] The 'Faërie Queene.'

[2] *I.e.*, before he was sufficiently acquainted with French to form a just opinion.

[3] *I.e.*, was not well done, referring to his translation of Tasso's 'Jerusalem.'

prose; that Sir John Harrington's 'Ariosto' under all translations was the worst; that when Sir John desired him to tell him the truth of his 'Epigrams,' he answered him that he loved not the truth, for they were narrations, and not epigrams; that Warner, since the King's[1] coming to England, had marred all his 'Albion's England'; that Donne's 'Anniversary' was profane and full of blasphemies; that he told Mr. Donne[2] if it had been written of the Virgin Mary it had been something, to which he answered that he described the idea of a Woman, and not as she was; that Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging; that Shakespeare wanted art; that Sharpham, Day, Dekker, were all rogues, and that

[1] James I. of England and VI. of Scotland.

[2] John Donne (1573—1631), Dean of St. Paul's.

Minshew was one; that Abram Francis,[1] in his English hexameters, was a fool; that next himself[2] only Fletcher and Chapman could make a masque.

IV.

His judgment of Stranger[3] Poets was that he thought not Bartas[4] a poet, but a verser, because he wrote fiction. He cursed Petrarch for redacting verses into sonnets; which he said were like that tyrant's bed, where some who were too short were racked, others too long cut short; that Guarini in his 'Pastor Fido'

[1] Abraham Fraunce.

[2] Dryden dubbed Jonson 'the most learned and judicious writer any theatre ever had.' His 'last plays,' however, according to the same illustrious authority, 'were but his dotages.'

[3] Foreign.

[4] Du Bartas. His 'Divine Weeks and Works were translated by Sylvester.

kept not decorum in making shepherds speak as well as himself could; that Lucan, taken in parts, was good divided: read altogether, merited not the name of a poet; that Bonnefon's 'Vigilum Veneris' was excellent; that he told Cardinal du Perron at his being in France, anno 1613, who showed him his translations of Virgil, that they were naught; that Ronsard's best pieces were his 'Odes.'[1]

V.

He read his translation of that Ode of Horace, 'Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,' and admired it. Of an epigram of Petronius, 'Fœda et brevis est Veneris

[1] Drummond challenged the accuracy of Jonson's statements throughout the whole of 'IV.' on the grounds that Ben knew scarcely any French or Italian; and, with reference to his translations from the Greek and Latin, Mr. Swinburne says that 'a worse translator than Ben Jonson never committed a double outrage on two languages at once.'

voluptas'; concluding it was better to lie still and kiss . . .

To me he read the preface of his 'Art of Poesy,' upon Horace's 'Art of Poetry' where he hath an apology of a play of his, 'St. Bartholemew's Fair': by 'Criticus' is understood Donne. There is an epigram of Sir Edward Herbert's before it: this he said he had done in my Lord Aubanie's[1] house ten years since, anno 1604.

The most commonplace of his repetition was a dialogue-pastoral between a shepherd and a shepherdess about singing. Another, 'Parabortes Parian,' with his letter; that 'Epigram of Gout'; my Lady Bedford's luck; his verses of drinking, 'Drink to me but with thine eyes[2]'; 'Swell me a bowl,' etc. His verses of a kiss,

[1] Esmè Stuart, Lord D'Aubigny.

[2] 'Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine,' etc.

'But kiss me once, and faith I will be gone;
And I will touch as harmless as the bee
That doth but taste the flower and flee away.'

That is but half a one; what should be done but once, should be done long.

He read a satire of a lady come from the bath; verses on the pucelle of the court, Mistress Boulstred, whose epitaph Donne made; a satire telling there was no abuses to write a satire of, and in which he repeateth all the abuses in England and the World. He insisted in that of Martial's 'Vitam quæ faciunt beatorem.'

VI.

His censure of my[1] verses was: That they were all good, especially my epitaph of the Prince, save that they smelled too much of the Schools, and were not after the fancy of the time; for a child,

[1] Drummond's.

says he, may write after the fashion of the Greek and Latin verses in running; yet that he wished, to please the King, that piece of 'Forth Feasting'[1] had been his own.

VII.

He esteemeth John Donne the first poet in the World in some things; his verses of the 'lost Ochadine' he hath by heart; and that passage of the Calm, that 'dust and feathers do not stir, all was quiet'; affirmeth Donne to have written all his best pieces before he was twenty-five years old.

Sir Henry Wotton's verses of 'a Happy Life' he hath by heart, and a piece of Chapman's translation of the thirteen of the Iliads, which he thinketh well done.

[1] Written by Drummond on the occasion of the royal visit to Edinburgh, 1617, under the title of (The River of) 'Forth Feasting.'

That Donne said to him, he wrote that epitaph on Prince Henry,[1] 'Look to me, Faith,' to match Sir Ed. Herbert in obscureness.

He hath by heart some verses of Spenser's 'Calendar,'[2] about wine, between Colin and Percy.

VIII.

The conceit of Donne's 'Transformation,' or 'Metempsychosis,' was that he sought the soul of that apple which Eve pulled, and thereafter made it the soul of a bitch, then of a she-wolf, and so of a woman. His general purpose was to have brought in all the bodies of the heretics from the soul of Cain, and at last left it

[1] The elder brother of Charles I. Drummond wrote a poem in his memory, referred to by Jonson.

[2] 'Shepherd's Calendar.'

in the body of Calvin; of this he never wrote but one sheet, and now, since he was made Doctor, repenteth highly, and seeketh to destroy all his poems.

IX.

That Petronius, Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, spoke the best Latin; that Quintilian's sixth, seventh, and eighth books were not only to be read, but altogether digested. Juvenal, Perse,[1] Martial, for delight; and so was Pindar; for health, Hippocrates.

Of their nation, Hooker's 'Ecclesiastical Polity' (whose children are now beggars), for church matters. Selden's 'Titles of Honour,' for antiquities here; and a book of the gods of the Gentiles, whose names are in the Scripture, of Selden's.

[1] Persius Flaccus.

Tacitus, he said, wrote the secrets of the council and senate, as Suetonius did of the cabinet and court.

X.

For a heroic poem, he said, there was no such ground as King Arthur's fiction; and that Sir P. Sidney had an intention to have transformed all his 'Arcadia' to the stories of King Arthur.

XI.

His acquaintance and behaviour with Poets living with him:

Daniel was jealous of him;

Drayton feared him; and he esteemed not of him;

that Fr. Beaumont loved too much himself and his own verses;

that Sir John Roe loved him; and when they two were ushered by my Lord Suffolk from a masque, Roe wrote a

moral epistle to him, which began, 'That next to plays the Court and State were best. God threateneth Kings, Kings Lords, as Lords do us';

he beat Marston, and took his pistol from him;

Sir W. Alexander was not half kind unto him, and neglected him, because a friend to Drayton;

that Sir Robert Aiton[1] loved him dearly;

Nid[2] Field was his scholar, and he had read to him the 'Satires' of Horace and some 'Epigrams' of Martial;

that Markham (who added his English 'Arcadia') was not of the number of the faithful,[3] and but a base fellow;

[1] Sir Robert Aytoun (1570—1638), a poet. 'He was acquainted,' says Aubrey, 'with all the wits of his time in England.'

[2] Nathan.

[3] Poets.

that such were Day and Middleton ;

that Chapman and Fletcher were loved of him ;

Overbury was first his friend, then turned his mortal enemy.

XII.

That the Irish, having robbed Spenser's goods, and burnt his house and a little child new born, he and his wife escaped ; and after, he died for lack of bread[1] in King Street, but refused twenty pieces sent to him by my Lord of Essex, and said he was sorry he had no time to spend them ; that in that paper Sir W. Ralegh had of the allegories of his 'Fairy Queen,' by the 'Blatant Beast' the Puritans were

[1] This is untrue. Spenser, although poor, was in receipt of an official salary, and his many friends would not have let him starve.

understood, by the 'false Duessa' the Queen of Scots;

that Southwell[1] was hanged; yet so he[2] had written that piece of his, the 'Burning Babe,' he would have been content to destroy many of his;

Francis Beaumont died ere he was thirty years of age;

Sir John Roe was an infinite spender, and used to say, 'when he had no more to spend he could die.' He died, in his arms, of the pest, and he furnished his charges —20 pounds, which was given him back;

that Drayton was challenged[3] for entitling one book 'Mortimeriados';

that Sir J. Davies played in an epigram

[1] Robert Southwell, a member of the Society of Jesus, was executed in London, 1595. Jonson's reference is to his exquisite poem commencing: 'As I in hoary winter's night.'

[2] Jonson. [3] Criticised.

on Drayton's, who, in a sonnet, concluded his mistress might have been the 'Ninth Worthy,' and said he used a phrase like Dametas in 'Arcadia,' who said, 'for wit his mistress might be a giant';

Donne's grandfather, on the maternal side, was Heywood, the epigrammatist. That Donne himself, for not being understood, would perish;

that Sir W. Ralegh esteemed more of fame than conscience. The best wits in England were employed for making his history.[1] Ben himself had written a piece for him of the Punic war, which he altered and set in his book; S. W.[2] hath written the life of Q. Elizabeth, of which there are copies extant;

Sir P. Sidney had translated some of

[1] 'History of the World.'

[2] Ralegh.

the Psalms, which went abroad under the name of the Countess of Pembroke ;[1]

Marston wrote his father-in-law's preachings, and his father-in-law his comedies ;

Shakespeare, in a play,[2] brought in a number of men saying they had suffered shipwreck in Bohemia, where there is no sea near by some 100 miles;

Daniel wrote 'Civil Wars,' and yet hath not one battle in all his book ;

the Countess of Rutland was nothing inferior to her father,[3] Sir P. Sidney, in

[1] Of this translation, undertaken by Sir Philip and Lady Pembroke, the first forty-three are by Sir Philip, the remainder by his sister. Donne praised the edition in a poem.

[2] The 'Winter's Tale.'

[3] Lady Rutland was Sir Philip's only surviving child. She died, s.p., in 1612. Drummond's estimate of Sir Philip's poetical genius was much higher than Jonson's. 'Among our English poets, Petrarch is imitated—nay, surpassed in some things—in matter and manner ; in matter none approach him to Sidney' (Drummond).

poetry. Sir T. Overbury was in love with her, and caused Ben to read his 'Wife' to her, which he, with an excellent grace, did, and praised the author. That, the morning thereafter, he discorded with Overbury, who would have him to intend a suit that was unlawful. The lines my Lady kept in remembrance, 'he comes near who comes to be denied.' Beaumont wrote that elegy on the death of the Countess of Rutland; and in effect her husband wanted the half of . . . in his travels;

Owen is a pure pedantic schoolmaster, sweeping his living from the posteriors of his little children; and hath nothing good in him, his epigrams being bare narrations;

Chapman hath translated Musæus, in his verses, like his Homer;[1]

Fletcher and Beaumont, ten years since,

[1] Jonson's frequent criticisms on Chapman's translations were by no means true or just.

hath written the 'Faithful Shepherdess,' a tragicomedy, well done;

Dyer[1] died unmarried;

Sir P. Sidney was no pleasant man in countenance, his face being spoilt with pimples, and of high blood, and long: that my Lord Lisle, now Earl of Worcester, his eldest son, resembleth him.[2]

XIII.

Of his own Life, Education, Birth, Actions.

His grandfather came from Carlisle, and, he thought, from Annandale to it,

[1] Sir Edward, author of that perfect poem, 'My Mind to me a Kingdom is.'

[2] This information is reported incorrectly by Drummond throughout. The hero of Zutphen had no son, and his brother Robert was created Earl of Leicester, not Worcester. Sir Philip's portraits reveal him as having had a clear, rather effeminate skin, free from blemishes. It is not known that Jonson ever saw Sir Philip, who died in 1586. He praised Lord Leicester in his poem, the 'Forest.'

he served King Henry VIII., and was a gentleman.[1] His father lost all his estate under Queen Mary, having been cast in prison and forfeited;[2] at last turned minister, so he was a minister's son. He himself was posthumous born, a month after his father's decease; brought up poorly, put to school by a friend (his master Camden, Clarencieux); after taken from it, and put to another craft,[3] which he could not endure; then went he to the Low Countries, but returning soon, betook himself to his wonted studies. In his service in the Low Countries he had,

[1] Aubrey says that 'Ben Jonson was a Warwickshire man.'

[2] This information, which has been accepted for gospel by many writers, was merely an ingenious, but probably unwarranted, attempt on Jonson's part to pretend that he was lineally descended from the Johnstones of Annandale.

[3] That of a bricklayer, his stepfather's trade.

in the face of both the camps, killed an enemy and taken 'opima spolia' from him; and since his coming to England, being appealed to the fields,[1] he had killed his adversary, who had hurt him in the arm, and whose sword was 10 inches longer than his; for the which he was imprisoned, and almost at the gallows.[2] Then took he his religion by trust, of a priest who visited him in prison. Thereafter he was twelve years a Papist;

he was Master of Arts in both the

[1] Challenged to a duel.

[2] Little could he have then anticipated that, when he was to take his departure from this world, he would receive the posthumous honours of burial in Westminster Abbey, as to which Aubrey records that 'he (Jonson) lies buried in the north aisle . . . with this inscription only on him, in a pavement square of blue marble 14 inches square, "O Rare Ben : Jonson," which was done at the charge of Jack Young, afterwards knighted, who, walking there when the grave was covering, gave the fellow eighteen pence to cut it.'

Universities, by their favour, not by his study;

he married a wife, who was honest, yet a shrew; five years he had not bedded with her, but remained with my Lord D'Aubigny; in the time of his close imprisonment, under Q. Elizabeth, his judges could get nothing of him to all their demands, but 'Aye' and 'No.' They placed two damned villains, to catch advantage of him, with him, but he was advertised by his keeper; of the spies he hath an epigram;

when the King came in England (at that time the pest was in London), he[1] being in the country at Sir R. Cotton's house with old Camden, he saw in a vision his eldest son, then a child and at London, appear unto him with the mark of a bloody

[1] Jonson.

cross on his forehead, as if it had been cut with a sword, at which amazed he prayed unto God, and in the morning he came to Master Camden's chamber to tell him; who persuaded him it was but an apprehension of his fancy, at which he should not be dejected; in the meantime there comes letters from his wife of the death of that boy from the plague. He appeared to him of a manly shape, and of that growth that he thinks he shall be at the Resurrection;

he was delated[1] by Sir James Murray to the King, for writing something against the Scots, in a play ('Eastward Ho'), and voluntarily imprisoned himself with Chapman and Marston, who had written it amongst them. The report was that they should have had their ears and noses cut.

[1] Accused.

After their delivery, he banqueted all his friends,—Camden, Selden, and others ; at the midst of the feast his old mother drank to him, and showed him a paper which she had (if the sentence had taken execution) to have mixed in the prison amongst his drink, which was full of lusty, strong poison, and that she was no churl, she told that she minded to first have drunk of it herself ;

he had many quarrels with Marston, beat him, and wrote his 'Poetaster' on him ; the beginning of them was that Marston represented him on the stage as in his youth given to venery. He thought the use of a maid nothing in comparison to the wantonness of a wife, and would never have any other mistress. He said two strange accidents befell him : one, that a man made his own wife to court him,

whom he enjoyed two years ere he knew of it, and one day, finding them by chance, was . . .[1]

Sir W. Ralegh sent him governor with his son,[2] anno 1613, to France. This youth being knavishly inclined, among other pastimes . . . caused him to be drunken, and dead-drunk, so that he knew not where he was; thereafter laid him on a car, which he[3] made to be drawn by pioneers through the streets, at every corner showing his governor stretched out, and telling them that was a more

[1] The remainder of this sentence I have omitted.

[2] *I.e.*, tutor to Ralegh's son.

[3] Ralegh's son, who was killed in battle, 1618, when with his father in America. 'One day, when Ben had taken a plentiful dose, and was fallen into a sound sleep, young Ralegh got a great basket and a couple of men, who laid Ben in it, and then with a pole carried him between their shoulders to Sir Walter, telling him their young master had sent home his tutor' (Oldys).

lively image of the crucifix than any they had, at which sport young Ralegh's mother delighted much (saying that his father when young was so inclined), though the father abhorred it. He can set horoscopes, but trusts not in them. He, with the consent of a friend, cozened a lady, with whom he had made an appointment to meet an old astrologer in the suburbs, which she kept; and it was himself disguised in a long gown and white beard, at the light of dim-burning candles, up in a little cabinet reached unto by a ladder;

every New Year's Day he had twenty pounds sent him from the Earl of Pembroke to buy books;

after that he was reconciled with the Church, and left off to be a recusant;[1] at his first communion, in token of true

[1] *I.e.*, ceased to be a Roman Catholic.

reconciliation, he drank out all the full cup of wine; being at the end of my Lord Salisbury's table with Inigo Jones, and demanded by my Lord why he was not glad: My Lord, saith he, you promised that I should dine with you, but I do not; for he had none of his meat; he esteemeth only that his meat which was of his own dish;

he hath consumed a whole night in lying looking at his great toe, about which he hath seen Tartars and Turks, Romans and Carthaginians, fight in his imagination;

Northampton was his mortal enemy for beating, on a St. George's day, one of his attenders; he was called before the Council for his 'Sejanus,' and accused both of popery and treason by him;[1]

sundry times he hath devoured his books;[2] he hath a mind to be a church-

[1] Lord Northampton.

[2] 'Sold them all for necessity.'—DRUMMOND.

man, and so he might have favour to make one sermon to the King, he careth not what thereafter should befall him, for he would not flatter though he saw death;

at his coming hither, Sir Francis Bacon said to him, 'he loved not to see Poetry go on other feet than dactyls and spondees.'

XIV.

His Narrations of Great Ones.

He never esteemed of a man for the name of a lord;

Q. Elizabeth never saw herself, after she became old, in a true glass; they painted her, and sometimes would vermilion her nose. She had always, about Christmas evens, set dice that threw sixes or fives, and she knew not they were other, to make her win and esteem

herself fortunate. That she had a membrane on her, which made her incapable of man, though for her delight she tried many. At the coming over of Monsieur,[1] there was a French chirurgeon who took in hand to cut it, yet fear stayed her, and his death. King Philip had intention, by dispensation of the Pope, to have married her;

Sir P. Sidney's mother,[2] Leicester's sister, after she had the small-pox, never showed herself thereafter at Court, except masked;

the Earl of Leicester gave a bottle of liquor to his lady, which he willed her to use in any faintness; which she, after his return from Court, not knowing it was poison, gave him, and so he died;

[1] Duke of Anjou.

[2] Lady Mary Sidney, sister of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, who is here referred to as having been poisoned by his wife.

Salisbury[1] never cared for any man longer than he could make use of him ;

my lord Lisle's[2] daughter, my lady Wroth, is unworthily married to a jealous husband ;

Ben, one day being at table with my lady Rutland, her husband coming in, accused her that she kept table to poets, of which she wrote a letter to him, which he answered. My lord intercepted the letter, but never challenged him ;

my Lord Chancellor of England wringeth his speeches from the strings of his band, and other councillors from the picking of their teeth ;

Pembroke and his lady discoursing, the Earl said 'the women were men's

[1] Robert Cecil, the Minister of James I.

[2] Robert Sidney, Earl of Leicester. His eldest daughter, Mary, married Sir R. Wroth. She wrote a romance called 'Urania.'

shadows, and she maintained them.' Both appealing to Jonson, he affirmed it true; for which my lady gave a penance to prove it in verse; hence his epigram;

Essex wrote that epistle, or preface, before the translation of the last part of Tacitus, which is A. B. The last book the gentleman durst not translate for the evil it contains of the Jews;

The King said Sir P. Sidney was no poet. Neither did he see any verses in England to the 'Sculler's';[1]

it were good that the half of the preachers of England were plain ignorants, for that either in their sermons they flatter, or strive to show their own eloquence.

[1] Meaning that John Taylor was the best poet in England. James, if this be true, must have changed his opinion since 1586-87, when he wrote and published a poem eulogizing Sir Philip's genius.

XV.

His Opinion of Verses.

That he wrote all his first in prose, for so his master, Camden, taught him ;

that verses stood by sense without either colours or accents ;[1]

a great many epigrams were ill because they expressed in the end what could have been understood by what was said. That of Sir J. Davies, 'Some loved running verses,' 'plus mihi complacet' ;

he imitated the description of a night from Bonnefons' 'Vigilium Veneris' ;

he scorned such verses as could be transposed,—

> 'Where is the man that never yet did hear
> Of fair Penelope, Ulysses' Queen?
> Of fair Penelope, Ulysses' Queen,
> Where is the man that never yet did hear?'[2]

[1] 'Which, yet other times, he denied.'—DRUMMOND.

[2] By Sir J. Davies.

XVI.

Of his Works.

That the half of his comedies were not in print ;

he hath a pastoral entitled the 'May-Lord';

his own name is 'Alkin'; 'Ethra' the Countess of Bedford's, 'Mogibel' Overbury, the old Countess of Suffolk an enchantress ; other names are given to Lady Somerset, Pembroke, the Countess of Rutland, Lady Wroth. In his first story Alkin cometh in mending his broken pipe ;[1]

he hath an intention to write a fishes or pastoral play, and set the stage[2] of it in the Lomond Lake ;

that 'epithalamium' that wants a name

[1] 'Contrary to all other pastorals, he bringeth the clowns making mirth and foolish sports.'—DRUMMOND.

[2] Scene.

in his printed works was made at the Earl of Essex's marriage;[1]

he is to write his foot pilgrimage hither, and to call it a 'Discovery';

in a poem he calleth 'Edinburgh'

'The heart of Scotland, Britain's other eye;'

a play of his, upon which he was accused, 'The Devil is an Ass'; according to 'Comedia Vetus,' in England the Devil was brought in with one Vice[2] or other; the play done, the Devil carried away the Vice; he brings in the Devil so overcome with the wickedness of his age that he thought himself an ass. Παρεργους is discoursed of the 'Duke of Drownland'; the King desired him to conceal it;

[1] This Countess of Essex afterwards married Somerset, the King's favourite She was tried, and convicted of the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury.

[2] Buffoon.

he hath commented and translated Horace's 'Art of Poetry;' it is in dialogue ways; by 'Criticus' he understandeth Dr. Donne. The old book that goes about, 'The Art of English Poetry,' was done twenty years since, and kept long in manuscript as a secret;

he had an intention to have made a play like Plautus' 'Amphitrio,' but left it off, for that he could never find two others so like that he could persuade the spectators they were one.

XVII.

Of his Jests and Apothegms.

At what time Henry the Fourth turned Catholic, Pasquill had in his hand a book, and was asked by Mophorius, what it was; he told him it was grammar. 'Why do ye

study grammar, being so old?' asked Mophorius. 'Because,' answered he, 'I have found a positive that hath no superlative, and a superlative that wants a positive: the King of Spain is Rex Catholicus, and is not Catholicissimus; and the French King Christianissimus, yet is not Christianus;

when they drank on him, he cited that of Pliny that they had called him 'Ad prandium non ad pœnam et notam';

and said of that panegyrist who wrote panegyrics in acrostics, window's crosses, that he was 'Homo miserrimæ patientiæ'; he scorned anagrams,[1] and had ever in his mouth

'Turpe est difficiles amare nugas,
Et stultus labor est ineptiarum.'

A cook who was of an evil life, when

[1] At that time very popular.

a minister told him he would be to hell, asked 'what torment was there.' Being answered 'Fire,' said he, 'That (fire) is my bedfellow';

a lord playing at tennis, and having asked those in the gallery 'whether a stroke was chase or loss,' a brother of my Lord Northumberland's answered 'it was loss.' The lord demanded if he did say it. 'I say it,' said he, 'what are you?' 'I have played your worth,' said the lord. 'Ye know not the worth of a gentleman!' replied the other. And it proved so, for ere he died he was greater than the other. Another English lord lost all his game; if he had seen a face that liked him not, he struck his balls at that gallery;

an Englishman who had maintained Democritus' opinion of atoms, being old, wrote a book to his son (who was not then

six years of age) in which he left him arguments to maintain, and answer objections, for all that was in his book ; only, if they objected obscurity against his book, he bid him answer that his father, above all names in the world, hated most the name of 'Lucifer,' and all open writers were 'Luciferi';

Butler excommunicated from his table all reporters of long poems, wilful disputers, tedious discoursers ; the best banquets were those where they ministered no musicians to chase time ;

the greatest sport he saw in France was the picture of our Saviour, with the Apostles, eating the Paschal lamb that was all larded ;

at a supper where a gentlewoman had given him unsavoury wildfowl, and, thereafter, to wash, sweet water, he commended

her that she gave him sweet water, because her flesh stinked;

he said to Prince Charles of Inigo Jones,[1] that when he wanted words to express the greatest villain in the world, he would call him an Inigo;

Jones having accused him for naming him, behind his back, a fool, he denied it; but, says he, I said he was an arrant knave, and I avouch it;

one who fired a tobacco-pipe with a ballad, the next day having a sore-head, swore he had a great singing in his head, and he thought it was the ballad; a poet should detest a ballad-maker;

he saw a picture painted by a bad painter of Esther, Haman, and Ahasuerus. Haman, courting Esther in a bed after the fashion of ours, was only seen by

[1] The famous architect. He prepared the scenery of some of Jonson's masques.

one leg. Ahasuerus' back was turned, with this verse over him, 'And wilt thou, Haman, be so malicious as to lie with my own wife in my own house ?'

He himself being once so taken, the goodman said, 'I would not believe you would abuse my house so';

in a profound contemplation, a student of Oxford ran over a man in the fields, and walked twelve miles ere he knew what he was doing;

one who wore side-hair being asked of another who was bald, 'why he suffered his hair to grow so long,' answered, 'it was to see if his hair would grow to seed, that he might sow it on bald pates';

a painter who could paint nothing but a rose, when an inn-keeper had advised with him about an ensing,[1] said, 'that a

[1] *I.e.*, when an inn-keeper had negotiated with him about painting a sign-board.

horse was a good one, so was a hare, but a rose was above them all ;

a little man drinking Prince Henry's health, between two tall fellows, said he made up the H ;

Sir H. Wotton, before his majesty's going to England, being disguised[1] at Leith, on Sunday, when all the rest were at church, being interrupted of his occupation . . .[2]

a Justice of Peace would have commanded a captain to sit first at table because, says he, 'I am a Justice of the Peace'; the other drawing his sword, commanded him, 'for,' saith he, 'I am a Justice of War';

[1] Wotton, then in the service of the Duke of Tuscany, lived some months in Scotland, anno 1602, disguised for political purposes as an Italian.

[2] The remainder of this sentence I have omitted.

what is that, the more you take out of it, groweth still the longer?—A ditch;

he used to say that they who delight to fill men extraordinary in their own houses, loved to have their meat again;

a certain Puritan minister would not give the Communion save to thirteen at once, (imitating as he thought our Master); now, when they were set, and one bethinking himself that some of them must represent Judas, that it should not be he, returned, and so did all the rest, understanding his thought;

a gentlewoman fell in such a frenzy with one Mr. Dod, a Puritan preacher, that she requested her husband, for the procreation of an angel or saint, that he might lie with her; which having obtained, it was but an ordinary birth;

Scaliger writes an epistle to Casaubon,

where he scorns us English speaking of Latin, for he thought he had spoke English to him;

a gentleman, reading a poem that began with

> 'Where is the man that never yet did hear
> Of fair Penelope, Ulysses' Queen?'

calling his cook, asked if he had ever heard of her; who, answering 'no,' demonstrate to him,

> 'Lo, there the man that never yet did hear
> Of fair Penelope, Ulysses' Queen!'

a waiting-woman, having cockered with muscadel and eggs her mistress' page, for a she meeting in the dark, his mistress invaded, of whom she would of such boldness have a reason. 'Faith, lady,' said he, 'I have no reason, save that such was the good pleasure of the muscadel and eggs;'

a judge coming along a hall, and being

stopped by a throng, cried 'Dominum cognoscite vestrum.' One of them there said, they would, if he durst say the beginning of that verse (for he had a fair wife): 'Actæon ego sum,' cried he, and went on;

a packet of letters, which had fallen overboard, was devoured of a fish that was taken at Flushing, and the letters were safely delivered to him whom they were written in London;

he scorned that simplicity of Cardan about the pebble-stone of Dover which, he thought, had that virtue, kept between one's teeth, as to save him from being sick;

a scholar, expert in Latin and Greek, but nothing in the English, said of hot breath, that he would make the danger of it, for it could not be ill English that was good Latin, 'facere periculum';

a translator of the 'Lives of the Emperors,' translated Antonius Pius, Antony Pye;

the word harlot was taken from Arlotte, who was the mother of William the Conqueror; a rogue from the Latin erro, by putting a 'g' to it;

Sir G. Percy asked the Mayor of Plymouth, 'whether it was his own beard or the town's beard that he came to welcome my Lord with'; for, he thought, it was so long, that he thought every one of the town had eked some part to it;

that he struck at Sir H. Bowe's breast, and asked him if he was within;

an epitaph was made upon one who had a long beard,

'Here lies a man at a beard's end,' etc.;

he said to the King, his master, Mr. G.

Buchanan,[1] had corrupted his ear when young, and learned[2] him to sing verses when he should have read them;

Sir F. Walsingham said of our King,[3] when he was ambassador in Scotland, 'Hic nunquam regnabit supernos';

of all his plays he never gained £200;

he had oft this verse, though he scorned it:

> 'So long as we may, let us enjoy this breath,
> For nought doth kill a man so soon as death;'

Heywood, the epigrammatist, being apparelled in velvet by Q. Mary, with his cap on in the presence, in spite of all the gentlemen, till the Queen herself asked him what he meant; and then he asked

[1] George Buchanan, the famous classical scholar and tutor to King James I.

[2] Taught.

[3] James, before his accession to the English throne.

her, 'if he was Heywood'; for she had made him so brave that he almost had misknown himself;

his impressa[1] was a compass with one foot in centre, the other broken; the word,[2] 'deest quod duceret orbem';

Essex, after his brother's death, Mr. Devereux, in France, at tilt had a black shield void, the word, 'par nulla figura dolori.' Another time, when the Queen was offended at him, a diamond with its own ashes, with which it is cut, about it the words 'dum formas minius';

he gave the prince,[3] 'fax gloria mentis honestæ';

he said to me that I was too good and simple, and that oft a man's modesty made a fool of his wit;

[1] His crest, used on a seal.

[2] His motto.

[3] Probably Prince Henry, eldest son of James I.

his arms were three spindles, or rhombi ;[1] his own word about them, 'percuntabor,' or 'perscrutator' ;

his epitaph, by a companion written, is

'Here lies Benjamin Jonson dead,
And hath no more in't than (a) goose in his head ;
That as he was wont, so doth he still,
Live by his wit, and evermore will.'

Another :

'Here lies honest Ben,
That had not a beard on his chen (chin).'

XVIII.

Miscellanies.

John Stow had monstrous observations in his Chronicle, and was of his craft a tailor. He and I were walking alone, he asked two cripples, what they would have to take him to their order ;

[1] Three cushions were a portion of the arms of the Johnstones of Annandale.

in his 'Sejanus' he hath translated a whole oration of Tacitus; the first four books of Tacitus ignorantly done into English;

J. Selden, liveth on his own, is the law-book of the judges of England, the bravest man in all languages; his book 'Titles of Honour,' written to chamber fellow Heyward;

Tailor was sent along here to scorn him;[1]

Camden wrote that book 'Remains of Britain';

Joseph Hall wrote the 'Harbinger' to Donne's 'Anniversary';

the epigram of Martial, 'vir verpium,' he wants to expone;

[1] Meaning that he thought Taylor the water-poet's journey to Scotland had been undertaken in derision of his own; but in this he was mistaken.

Lucan, Sidney, Guarini, make every man speak as well as themselves, forgetting decorum ; for Dametas sometimes speaks grave sentences ; Lucan, taken in parts is excellent, altogether—naught ;

he dissuaded me from Poetry, for that she had beggared him, when he might have been a rich lawyer, physician, or merchant ;

questioned about English, 'them,' 'they 'those';—'they' is still the nominative, 'those' accusative, 'them' neuter ; collective, not 'them' men, 'them' trees, but 'them' by itself referred to many. 'Which,' 'who,' be relatives, not 'that.' 'Floods,' 'hills,' he would have masculine ;

he was better versed, and knew more in Greek and Latin than all the poets in England, and quintessence their brains ;

he made much of that epistle of

Pliny's, where 'ad prandium, non ad notam' is; and that other of 'Marcellinus,' who Pliny made to be removed from the table; and of the gross turbot;

one wrote one epigram to his father, and vaunted he had slain ten, the quantity of 'decem' being false. Another answered the 'epigram,' telling that 'decem' was false;

of all styles he loved most to be named 'Honest,' and hath of that one hundred letters so naming him;

he had this oft,—

> 'Thy flattering picture, Phryne, is like thee
> Only in this, that ye both painted be;'

in his merry humour he was wont to name himself the Poet;

he went from Leith homeward, the 25th of January, 1619, in a pair of shoes

which, he told. lasted him since he came from Darnton,[1] which he minded to take back that far again, they were appearing like Coryat's ;[2] the first two days he was all excoriate ;

if he died by the way, he promised to send me his papers of this country, hewn as they were ;

I have to send him descriptions of Edinburgh, Borrow Lawes, and of the Lomond ;[3]

that piece of the 'Pucelle of the Court' was stolen out of his pocket by a gentleman who drank him drowsy, and given Mistress Boulstred, which brought him great displeasure.

[1] Darlington.

[2] An author of a book of travels.

[3] This proves that Jonson appreciated fine scenery; and probably more so than Drummond, who, in his poems, makes no mention of his own beautiful home.

CHAPTER III

DRUMMOND'S OPINION OF JONSON

Of 'rare' Ben Jonson Drummond's description was not flattering, as the record below will reveal. A bitter controversy has taken place concerning the justice of the Scottish poet's criticisms, as to which I leave the reader to form his own decision.

'He (Ben Jonson) is a great lover and praiser of himself, a contemner and scorner of others; given rather to lose a friend than a jest; jealous of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink,[1] which is one of the elements in

[1] 'He would many times exceed in drink: Canary was his beloved liquor.'—AUBREY.

which he liveth); a dissembler of ill parts which reign in him,[1] a bragger of some good that he lacketh; thinketh nothing well, but what either he himself, or some of his friends and countrymen, have said or done; he is passionately kind and angry; careless either to gain or keep; vindictive, but if he be well answered, at himself.

'For any religion, as being versed in both.[2] Interpreteth best sayings and deeds often to the worst. Oppressed with phantasy, which hath ever mastered his reason, a general disease in many poets. His inventions are smooth and easy; but, above all, he excelleth in a translation.

[1] Jonson, nevertheless, made himself so popular while in the north, that he was given the freedom of Edinburgh.

[2] Catholic and Protestant.

'When his play of a "Silent Woman"[1] was first acted, there were found verses after, on the stage, against him, concluding that the play was well named the "Silent Women" (for) there was never one man to say "Plaudite" to it.'

[1] 'Epicœne; or, The Silent Woman,' a comedy produced in 1609.

This play was produced several years before Jonson was made (our first) Poet Laureate. His successors in that office have been—Davenant, Dryden, Shadwell, Tate, Rowe, Eusden, Cibber, Whitehead, Warton, Pye, Southey, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Austin.

THE END.

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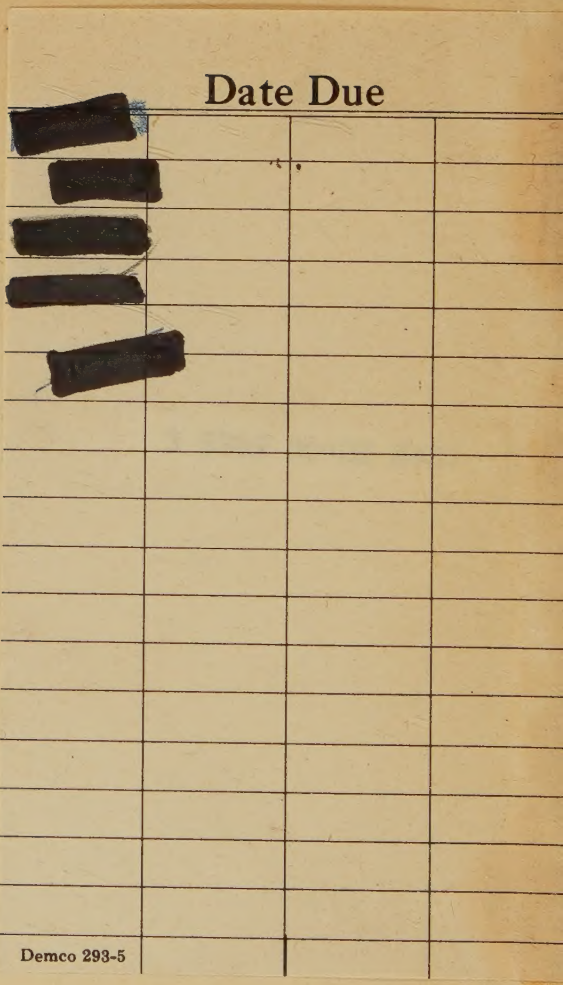
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